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THE ENVIRONMENT FUND AND ADMINISTRATIVE
AND OTHER BUDGETARY MATTERS

Enhancing human resource utilization within the United Nations Environment Programme while ensuring the complementary and appropriate use of individual and corporate consultancies

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

At its eighteenth session, the Governing Council adopted decision 18/48 seeking to ensure that human resources within the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) could effectively meet functional demands. At the same session, the Governing Council adopted decision 18/49 noting with concern the financial burden that had previously been incurred through expenditure on individual and corporate consultancies. Pursuant to those decisions, the present report summarizes efforts taken by UNEP to enhance the quality of human resources and human resource management within the organization.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Governing Council may wish to take note of the present report of the Executive Director.

* UNEP/GC.19/1.

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I. EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE LEVEL OF EXPERTISE IN UNEP

1. UNEP engages in an ongoing programme of staff training, subject to the availability of funds, through the comprehensive services provided by the Human Resource Management Service (HRMS) of the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON). At the broadest level, courses that teach, as well as review, a range of office automation skills are available for all staff members. Similarly, staff members may receive language tuition in all official United Nations languages where appropriate. More specific training is available for senior-level staff to fully exploit management information systems as well as project development techniques. In addition, UNON HRMS administers United Nations system-wide proficiency tests such as the competitive examination for promotion of staff from the General Service and other categories to the Professional category.

2. In order to ensure the recruitment of the highest-quality staff, vacancy announcements are circulated to all Permanent Representatives, UNEP's regional and outposted offices, as well as other United Nations organizations. Vacancies are also advertized within the organization according to the United Nations guidelines. In addition, copies of the announcements are provided to programme managers for distribution to institutions that may concentrate in the area of expertise specifically required. Occasionally, when circumstances warrant, newspaper or journal advertizing is employed.

3. At its eighteenth session, the Governing Council requested, in its decision 18/48, that new approaches to improving the level of skills and knowledge within the organization should be examined. In this light, the possibility of establishing a formal staff rotational policy has been analysed. While such a policy may have some merit in helping maintain an up-to-date institutional awareness of contemporary scientific developments, the cost of recruiting, transferring and repatriating staff with such a level of frequency would be prohibitive for UNEP and would lead to severe constraints on project expenditure. However, to a considerable extent staff rotation already takes place within the organization. The natural level of staff turnover means that approximately 10 per cent of the staff have been newly recruited every year. In addition, there already exists some rotation of staff within the organization, both between different organizational units and also from headquarters to outposted and regional offices as well as convention secretariats. For the biennium 1994-1995, approximately 10 per cent of staff were rotated between positions within the various offices administered under the auspices of UNEP. In sum, existing rotational mechanisms have enabled staff members with specific skills to transfer to programme areas that more effectively utilize their expertise in line with evolving programme priorities. UNEP is fully aware of the potential benefits of rotating staff and supports staff rotation where beneficial to the work of subprogramme units.

4. Skills and knowledge within UNEP are also augmented by the valuable contribution of Junior Professional Officers who introduce technical abilities and research awareness from the leading edge of the environmental debate. In a similar vein, the establishment of a structured internship programme exposes UNEP to the latest developments from within scientific and academic institutions. Furthermore, UNEP's institutional expertise across

the various subprogramme elements is supplemented and expanded through participation in global, regional and subregional information networks.

II. POLICY GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING CONSULTANTS

5. Existing staff resources are supplemented as required through consultancy services. As requested by Governing Council decision 18/49, an Executive Directive1/ has been issued to all staff emphasizing the principles to be taken into account in selecting consultants. During the 1996-1997 biennium, UNEP has implemented several procedures designed to ensure that consultancies are awarded only where appropriate. The guidelines and the resulting developments are outlined in paragraphs 6 - 11 below.

6. Consultancies should be awarded on the basis of expertise and value for money. In the light of this instruction and in response to the financial crisis currently facing UNEP, the Office of the Executive Director now reviews and gives final approval to all proposed consultancies. This procedure augments the existing clear guidelines that have governed the decision-making of programme managers in the past and is designed to underline the current need for recruiting only the highest-quality consultants as well as ensuring that economy measures are implemented as far as possible by limiting consultancies to those programme areas with the highest priority.

7. The number of consultancies as well as the cost of each consultancy should be kept to a minimum. Since 1993 the number of consultancies that are financed from the Environment Fund and that exceed a duration of one month have decreased annually by approximately 17 per cent. This trend has continued in the current biennium as the number of consultancies are reduced due to budgetary constraints and higher quality-control standards. Furthermore, the total expenditure on consultancies has fallen at a rate of approximately 21 per cent a year since 1993. As a result, the average expenditure per consultancy is decreasing.

8. In accordance with the appropriate United Nations Administrative Instructions, consultancies should only be awarded when it is clearly established that the appropriate expertise is not available in-house. This principle is further underpinned by the review of all proposed consultancies by the Office of the Executive Director.

9. Consultancies should demonstrably contribute to UNEP's approved programme of work. Programme managers have therefore been advised that the purpose of consultancies must closely reflect the outputs requested and approved under the appropriate Governing Council decisions.

10. Consultancies should be selected with due consideration to geographical and gender balance. Programme managers have been advised to carefully consider potential consultants from developing countries and countries with economies in transition when making selections. In addition, UNON HRMS has fully updated and computerized the roster of consultants with specific

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1/ UNEP/ED/1996/4 of 5 March 1996.

attention to expanding the geographic spread of listed candidates. Simultaneously, the roster has been redefined in consultation with UNEP programme managers and is now more responsive to the substantive and programmatic needs of the organization. As a result of these developments the geographical base from which consultants are recruited has expanded. In 1993, 45 per cent of consultants were recruited from countries not members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). By 1995, 54 per cent of consultants were recruited from non-OECD countries and this trend continues to be encouraged. Programme managers are also advised to take due consideration of gender when selecting candidates with a view to improving the gender balance of consultancies, in line with United Nations guidelines.

11. No one country should provide a disproportionate share of consultants. As reflected in the above statistics, programme managers are encouraged to consider candidates for consultancies from all countries. In 1993, one country provided 19 per cent of consultancies. By 1995, the maximum share for any one country was 16 per cent. Efforts are also under way to ensure that consultancies are equitably distributed by geographical region.

III. REPORTING TO THE COMMITTEE OF PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVES ON CONSULTANCIES

12. In accordance with Governing Council decisions 18/42 and 18/49, the Executive Director continues to report on the status of consultancies on a quarterly basis to the Committee of Permanent Representatives. The regular reports include details of the cost and purpose of consultancies awarded, length of consultancies and geographical distribution of consultants.

13. In addition, a statement has been prepared for the Committee of Permanent Representatives outlining the procedures to be followed in identifying the need for consultancies, selecting consultancies and assessing the duties that had been performed.

III. EVALUATION OF CONSULTANCIES

14. Programme managers are required to complete the evaluation section of the Special Service Agreement (SSA) for each consultancy. The purpose of the evaluation is to grade the quality of the work performed and provide a recommendation as to whether the consultant should be considered for future employment. In view of the need to ensure quality and implement economy measures, it is particularly important that consultancies are carefully evaluated and monitored.